

Remarks Following Discussions With NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and an Exchange With Reporters *April 22, 1999*

The President. Good afternoon. Secretary General Solana and I have just had a good meeting reviewing the NATO Summit. Our alliance is strongly united today, in no small measure because of his leadership. He has made a tremendous difference as we have worked to reshape NATO to meet new challenges and as we have responded to Mr. Milosevic's repression in Kosovo.

Serb forces there have pushed nearly 1.4 million people, three-quarters of Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, from their homes. They have killed thousands, confiscated identity papers, separated parents from children, buried victims in mass graves, told Kosovars, "Take a last look around, for you will never return to Kosovo."

NATO's response has been firm and persistent. Our objective is clear: We want all the people of Kosovo restored to their homes, free of the hostile presence of Mr. Milosevic's forces; protected by an international security force; enjoying liberty and self-government. Mr. Milosevic can accept this outcome, or he can watch as NATO grinds down his war machine and the Serb people he claims to represent face mounting hardship.

Our allied forces come from many backgrounds, but they are working together, now, through some 9,000 air sorties. They have weakened Mr. Milosevic's defenses, command and control, and capacity to produce fuel and ammunition. We are attacking the infrastructure that supports the military offensive, including bridges and electrical power. Increasingly, we are striking at tanks, artillery, and aircraft, and in recent days we've begun to strike key facilities used to direct and incite the campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Meanwhile, our relief efforts are working to bring order out of chaos and hope to those in despair. I am grateful to all the Americans, and indeed, to people around the world who have provided assistance.

Now, tomorrow, the leaders of 42 nations will gather here for NATO's 50th Anniversary Summit. This summit will enable our alliance to advance our mission in Kosovo and to plan for

a better future—to build a Europe that is undivided, democratic, and at peace.

This crisis in Kosovo has underscored the importance of the efforts we have been making for 5 years now to strengthen and adapt NATO for the new century, to enhance our capacity to address regional and ethnic conflicts on NATO's doorstep, to protect our citizens against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, to improve security cooperation with partner nations across Europe, to help aspiring members improve their candidacies so they can join NATO.

At our summit, we will advance these efforts, meet with partner nations, including Ukraine and the nations of the frontline of the Kosovo crisis. We will reaffirm our commitment to advancing our cooperation for peace and stability with Russia, for though we have differences on Kosovo, the world benefits when we work together.

And we will further our efforts for deeper democracy, tolerance, economic development, and regional integration in southeastern Europe, in the hopes that soon all the people there, including the Serbs who are now suffering from Mr. Milosevic's reckless tyranny, can have peace, prosperity, and true freedom.

Now I'd like Secretary General Solana to say a few words. Mr. Secretary General.

Secretary General Solana. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Let me start by saying that this NATO Summit here in Washington will be one of the most important meetings that the alliance has ever held. Our focus will be on the immediate, particularly in Kosovo. It is no doubt the gravest crisis that Europe and NATO have faced for many years.

And it is with respect that I would like to salute the leadership that you, Mr. President, and your country, the United States, have shown since the very beginning of this crisis. Without that leadership, without the enormous contribution that the United States is making to the Operation Allied Force, we could not succeed in our goal. And our goal is to stop the human tragedy in Kosovo. If Europe is to enjoy a stable, democratic peace, it is essential that our

values prevail in Kosovo, and not those values of Milosevic.

At our summit tomorrow, we will demonstrate our alliance unity, the alliance resolve. We will not be divided; we will not be diverted from our objective. And the objective is clear: the removal of Serb forces from Kosovo, and as the President has said, an international force that will be able to assure that the refugees, the people which are really suffering now, can go back to their country, to their homes with security. Ethnic cleansing is a crime, and we have to reverse it.

We will also signal our determination to intensify the political and military pressure on Belgrade until our goals are met. And we will state our commitment to both an immediate and a longer term effort to assist and rebuild southeastern Europe, a region which has seen too much human suffering and too much instability for far too long.

We know that our values are the right ones, but if they are to have meaning, they have to be defended. This sometimes requires patience and, in any case, requires perseverance.

We must take care not only of Milosevic's aggression but also of his victims. This is what NATO is doing with its effort to solve the refugee crisis.

Let there be no doubt: NATO will see this through to the end. We have the means, and we have the will. That will be, no doubt, the message of this Washington Summit.

But as the President has said, at the same time, in the summit we are going to look to the future. We're going to take decisions that will equip this alliance to be fully ready for all its new roles and new missions for the 21st century. We're going to build a new security order in Europe, in cooperation with our many partner countries.

As the President has said, on Sunday the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council will bring, on top of the 19 countries of NATO, another 20 partners. It will take place here in Washington. It seems to me that it will be not only the largest international meeting that this Capital has ever seen but one of the most important ever to have taken place.

Let me say that it will also be another important moment in building a Europe in which the barbarities we see in Kosovo have no place and will not be tolerated.

Mr. President, it was great. Thank you very much for your leadership.

Q. Mr. President—

Q. Mr. President—

Q. Mr. President, are you as committed now to now using—

The President. One at a time, one at a time.

Situation in the Balkans

Q. Mr. President, I wonder if you could clarify the U.S. Government's position on Secretary General Solana's decision yesterday to authorize a reassessment of last year's plan to possibly introduce ground forces into Kosovo. Does this represent a precursor to that kind of decision?

The President. Well, the answer to your last question is, no. The answer to your first question is, I support the Secretary General's decision to update the assessment. I think it is a wise and prudent course.

Now, my position is still the same. I support the strategy we have embraced. It has the unity of the alliance, and it will be vigorously prosecuted. A vigorous prosecution of the air campaign, an intensification of economic pressures, along with our continuing diplomatic efforts, I believe is the correct strategy. And I believe it will succeed. But I support the decision he made. I think it's only prudent.

Q. Mr. President, there are reports of a new offer by Milosevic to the Russians to allow some type of security force into Kosovo. Number one, what do you know about this offer? And number two, will any security force have to have not only NATO troops but also American forces on the ground as well?

The President. Well, first of all, it's hard—I cannot comment on the offer because I literally don't know anything other than what you just said—that is, I heard about it just a few minutes before you did or after you did or at the same time, so I cannot comment on the details. If there is an offer for a genuine security force, that's the first time that Mr. Milosevic has ever done that, and that represents, I suppose, some step forward.

My interest here is in something that will work that will have the support of the parties. My belief is that the members of our alliance want us all to be able to go in there and that

the Kosovar Albanians want to feel protected and will expect us to be there.

I have always said from the very beginning that I would hope that there would be Russian troops there, Ukrainian troops there, troops from Slavic countries, from Orthodox Christian countries, because I would not entertain going into Kosovo unless our mandate was to protect all the people there, including the Serb minority.

There will be—after all the stuff the Albanians have been through and all the people who have been killed and the families that have been wrecked and the homes that have been burned and the records that have been destroyed, there will be people who will inevitably be looking for some outlet for vengeance there.

So I can't comment on this except to say if it is true, then it is at least the first acknowledgement by Mr. Milosevic that there will have to be a security force there. But for the security force to work, it will have to have the confidence of the people who live there. And it will have to operate in a way that protects all the people there, including the Serb minority.

Q. Secretary Solana and President Clinton, is NATO targeting Slobodan Milosevic directly? They destroyed one of his residences.

Secretary General Solana. The objective of this military campaign, as you know it very well, is very clear, has five points. We want to stop the killing. We want to have all the troops withdrawn from Serbia, from Kosovo. We want an international force, military force, to guarantee the security of Kosovo and to guarantee, fourth, the return of refugees. And for us, this is the most important commitment. The refugees that have been expelled brutally from that country, they have to return. And fifth, we want a political agreement in the terms that the President has mentioned.

Q. Yes, but I'm talking about the attack against one of the residences of Milosevic.

The President. The answer to your—yes, I understand your question. The answer to your question is, no, but we are targeting command and control facilities. And I think it is important.

You know, when the weather permits, we go after the tanks and we go after the soldiers. But the tanks and the soldiers are there because people who believe in ethnic cleansing ordered them to go there. And in this conflict, it would be wrong and unfair not to target the command and control operations as well. And that's why the Socialist Party headquarters in Belgrade, for example, was targeted.

Q. Mr. President, can the Kosovar refugees ever go home, with an international security force, without Mr. Milosevic giving his okay?

The President. Well, that's a hypothetical question, but, of course, there are scenarios under which that could occur.

Q. Mr. President, can you imagine an outcome in this war, sir, that would leave Milosevic in power?

The President. Well, we set forth certain conditions, and if he meets those conditions and the Serbian people are willing to continue him in power, then I could imagine such an outcome. Now, that begs the question of what the War Crimes Tribunal will do or what other action might be taken.

But we—NATO has never taken a position on that issue. Our concern has been for the Kosovar people, for the welfare of the refugees, for the integrity of their life and how they are treated.

Secretary General Solana. I would like to add to what the President has said, it would really concern us in the future of the people who have been suffering—being expelled from their houses, from their country—to see them returned. That we are going to see, and that's our main concern and the concern that we have now to continue.

The President. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:05 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).